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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 004380

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PNAT](#) [PHUM](#) [IZ](#) [KRG](#)

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT TALABANI'S CHIEF OF STAFF COMMENTS ON
MERGER BETWEEN PUK AND KDP

Classified By: Political Counselor Robert S. Ford
for Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

1. (C) SUMMARY: The Kurds appear fairly confident about their chances in the December election, and have begun working on their joint list of candidates, according to Kamiran Karadaghi, President Talabani's chief of staff, on October 23. The two Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) administrations must be combined, but Karadogi warned that forcing the issue would be destabilizing. In response to PolOffs' query on the issue of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) reported infiltration of the Makhmour refugee camp, Karadogi replied that both the PUK and the KDP knew the PKK was operating out of the camp. He said that neither the Kurds nor the Americans could afford to take on this issue, and warned that Kurdish support for the U.S. in Iraq would evaporate if the Americans went after the PKK. He offered his own solution to the PKK issue: offer a general amnesty to the PKK in Turkey and offer a quiet conference between Turkish military and political leaders, Iraqi Kurds, and the U.S. END SUMMARY.

A National Accord?

2. (C) Karadogi confirmed that the PUK and KDP had formed a joint committee, along with some other smaller groups in Kurdistan, to present a unified candidate list for the December 15 election. He confided that many in both the PUK and the KDP were unhappy with the quality of their representation in the TNA this year, and were seeking to field more qualified and proactive members. Even a 40 percent improvement in the caliber of the candidates would be a major achievement, complained Karadogi.

3. (C) Talabani gave too much consideration to candidates from his own PUK party, Karadogi continued. He emphasized that he himself was not a member of any Kurdish party but was merely reporting as a neutral observer. He indicated that Talabani would remain the Kurds' candidate for President in the coming election, and that Barzani would continue to operate out of Irbil.

Irbil and Sulymaniyah to Combine?

4. (C) Karadogi stated that Talabani and KDP leader Masud Barzani had met in Irbil recently to discuss the details of merging the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) administrations in Irbil and Sulymaniyah. The talks had even named a single KRG Prime Minister designate that both sides supported. However, there was more difficulty in deciding what to do with the rest of the civil servants in the two administrative organizations. He was quick to reassure us that the service ministries were not going to be an issue, as both governments had excellent records; however, finding suitable positions for the technocrats in Irbil and Sulymaniyah was slowing the process down.

5. (C) When pressed on how to speed up the process, Karadogi admitted that he was not concerned about the delay. "A merger idea was floated in 1997 and 1998 and it didn't work," he stated flatly. He countered that separate governments actually worked to Kurdistan's advantage - the two sides were so busy competing with each other to provide security and services for their people that they did not have time to fight. There was no hurry to merge, he concluded. Indeed, he said, forcing the issue would result in destabilizing the region and creating a less effective government.

Who's Afraid of the PKK?

6. (C) In response to PolOffs' query on the issue of

the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) reported infiltration of the Makhmour refugee camp, Karadogi replied that both the PUK and the KDP knew the PKK was operating out of the camp, but that neither the Kurds nor the Americans could afford to take on this issue. The Kurdish public in the north would not support any attack against other Kurds, regardless of their affiliation, he stated. Both parties have advised the U.S. not to get involved in fighting the PKK, Karadaghi said. He warned that Kurdish support for the U.S. in Iraq would evaporate if the Americans went after the PKK.

17. (C) Karadogi offered his own solution to the PKK issue: offer a general amnesty to the PKK in Turkey and offer a quiet conference between Turkish military and political leaders, Iraqi Kurds, and the U.S. The PKK would immediately disband if offered an amnesty and a chance to go back to their homes in the north of Turkey, according to Karadogi. Unlike Kurds in Iraq, Turkish Kurds had more of a sense of Turkish identity, are fully integrated economically, and if offered the chance would be willing to peacefully coexist with the Turks. The key is not to make amnesty a political issue, he stressed, just a practical move to stop the violence. When pressed by Poloffs on how such an amnesty could avoid politicization, especially when the Turkish Kurds begin to press for regional autonomy like their Iraqi brethren, Karadogi just shrugged his shoulders and laughed.

COMMENT

18. (C) Karadogi's comments on eventual merger of the KRGs in Irbil and Sulymaniyah echo reports Embassy Baghdad have been hearing from other sources in Kurdistan. Although the two parties will eventually be merging the two regional government structures and presenting a joint list for the election, the KDP and PUK continue to operate as two wholly separate entities. The overall impression is that any decisions on combining the two main Kurdish parties will be delayed as long as the delicate balance of power between Talabani and Barzani is maintained.

Satterfield